

Beyond Boundaries - Turning Conservation Targets into Conserved Areas

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As the manager of 2.4 million acres of state owned aquatic bedlands, tidelands and shorelands, the Washington Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) is directed to protect sites that are of special educational or scientific interest, or of special environmental importance through designation as State Aquatic Reserves. The Aquatic Reserve program is responsive to proposals originating from DNR, other agencies, or the public. The review process proceeds from proposal, to independent proposal evaluation, to recommendation for reserve status, and finally the development of a proposed management plan before sites are designated as Aquatic Reserves. This presentation will examine the process of moving these sites from the list of priorities for conservation through the evaluation process to ultimately adopting a new management strategy for areas that met the evaluation criteria. The process of moving a site from a priority list to protected status requires several steps including: confirmation of conservation/restoration importance; picking appropriate conservation strategies, developing a management plan, identifying performance measures, and ultimately executing the conservation or restoration strategy. The experiences of Washington DNR in establishing aquatic reserves illustrate some of the challenges faced by a government agency in managing for the conservation needs of priority estuarine habitat.